

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 VIENTI 04775 01 OF 02 170605Z

15

ACTION EA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9507
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
AMEMBASSY SAIGON
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
USLO PEKING
CINCPAC
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 VIENTIANE 4775

DEPT FOR EA/LC - PLEASE PASS TO AMBASSADOR WHITEHOUSE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PFOR, UR, LA

SUBJECT: SOVIET POLICY TOWARD LAOS, VIEWED FROM VIENTIANE

BACKGROUND

1. SOVIET POLICY TOWARD LAOS HAS UNDERGONE SEVERAL PERMUTATIONS OVER THE PAST DECADE. FROM 1960-62, THE SOVIETS FURNISHED LARGE QUANTITIES OF SUPPLIES TO THE PATHET LAO AND TO SOUVANNA'S NEUTRALIST FORCES, HEADQUARTERED ON THE PLAIN OF JARS. FOLLOWING THE KENNEDY-KHRUSHCHEV VIENNA MEETING IN 1961, THE SOVIETS BEGAN TO URGE THE NORTH VIETNAMESE AND THE PATHET LAO TO PARTICIPATE IN THE NEGOTIATIONS WHICH PRODUCED THE 1962 GENEVA AGREEMENTS,
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PAGE 02 VIENTI 04775 01 OF 02 170605Z

RESULTING IN THE FORMATION OF A LAO COALITION GOVERNMENT

THE SAME YEAR. AFTER THE AGREEMENTS AND THE GOVERNMENT BROKE DOWN IN 1963-64, THE SOVIETS DISENGAGED FROM ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN LAOS, THOUGH MAINTAINING THEIR LINKS WITH THE PATHET LAO THROUGH THE NORTH VIETNAMESE. THEIR EMBASSY PROFILE IN VIENTIANE WAS KEPT LOW, AND THEY CONCENTRATED ON LONG-RANGE INTELLIGENCE EFFORTS. BECAUSE OF THE INDO-CHINA WAR, AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN LAOS WAS TOO MASSIVE TO PERMIT MUCH SCOPE FOR ACTIVE SOVIET DIPLOMACY.

2. BY PROVIDING CONSIDERABLE MILITARY AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE TO THE PATHET LAO THROUGH THE NORTH VIETNAMESE, THE SOVIETS --OVER THE PAST DECADE--APPEAR TO HAVE SECURED A SOLID BASE OF INFLUENCE WITHIN THE LAO COMMUNIST MOVEMENT. EVIDENCE OF THIS IS, OF COURSE, FRAGMENTARY; BUT THE SIGNS ARE UNMISTAKABLE. AFTER THE SIGNING OF THE LAOS AGREEMENT IN 1973, LAO COMMUNIST PARTY SECRETARY-GENERAL KAYSONE PHOMVIHARN RESPONDED PERSONALLY TO TELEGRAMS OF CONGRATULATIONS FROM SOVIET PARTY CHAIRMAN BREZHNEV, NORTH VIETNAMESE PARTY SECRETARY-GENERAL LE DUAN, AND MONGOLIAN PARTY CHAIRMAN TSEDENBAL--BUT NO TELEGRAMS WERE EXCHANGED WITH PARTY LEADERS OF THE PRC. OF THE FIFTY TOP LAO COMMUNIST LEADERS, ONLY A FEW HAVE ANY CONTACT WITH CHINA IN THEIR KNOWN BIOGRAPHIES, BUT MANY OF THE REMAINDER HAVE LONG-STANDING TIES WITH THE SOVIET UNION. MANY HAVE CHILDREN STUDYING IN THE SOVIET UNION. THE PRC HAS NO EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE PROGRAM WITH LAOS, BUT THE SOVIETS HAVE PROVIDED CONSIDERABLE TRAINING FOR PATHET LAO YOUTH. SOVIET EFFORTS TO TRAIN PATHET LAO ARE INTENSIFYING AGAIN. THE PATHET LAO, LIKE THE NORTH VIETNAMESE, ARE NATURALLY UNEASY ABOUT CHINESE INTENTIONS BECAUSE OF HISTORIC CHINESE MEDDLING IN LAOS, AND THE SHEER MASS OF HUNDREDS-OF-MILLIONS OF CHINESE ON THEIR FRONTIER. ALL THESE FACTORS SUGGEST THAT GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIETS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR THE PATHET LAO NOT ONLY AS SOURCE OF AID AND SUPPORT BUT ALSO AS COUNTERWEIGHT TO THEIR POTENTIALLY OVERWHELMING CHINESE NEIGHBOR AND TO THE NO LESS INFLUENTIAL NORTH VIETNAMESE.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

3. AS NEGOTIATIONS QUICKENED BETWEEN THE VIENTIANE SIDE
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PAGE 03 VIENTI 04775 01 OF 02 170605Z

AND PATHET LAO IN 1973, THE SOVIET EMBASSY PLAYED AN INCREASINGLY ACTIVE PART IN SECURING NON-COMMUNIST APPROVAL OF PATHET LAO PROPOSALS. THE SOVIET MILITARY ATTACHE LOBBIED DILIGENTLY WITH RLGA GENERAL--WHO WERE THE PRINCIPAL OPPONENTS OF THE LAOS AGREEMENT--AND EVEN HOSTED A VITAL MEETING AT WHICH THE PATHET LAO GAVE VERBAL ASSURANCES WHICH ALLAYED THE GENERALS' FEARS REGARDING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROPOSED LAOS PROTOCOL.

(THESE ASSURANCES WERE NOT LATER RESPECTED.) SINCE THE UNITED STATES WAS ALSO WORKING AT THAT TIME TO FOSTER THE LAOS SETTLEMENT, SOVIET AND AMERICAN EFFORTS RAN PARALLEL AT THAT TIME.

4. FOLLOWING SIGNATURE OF THE IMPLEMENTING PROTOCOL TO THE LAOS AGREEMENT ON SEPTEMBER 14, 1973, THE SOVIETS AIRLIFTED OVER 1,500 PATHET LAO PERSONNEL AND MANY TONS OF EQUIPMENT TO VIENTIANE TO SERVE IN THE VARIOUS JOINT BODIES CREATED BY THE PROTOCOL. THE SOVIETS ALSO STEPPED UP PROPAGANDA AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES, AND ARE CONTINUING TO PROVIDE EQUIPMENT AND OTHER DAILY NECESSITIES TO THE PATHET LAO CONTINGENT IN VIENTIANE. THE SOVIET PROPAGANDA APPARATUS WARMLY WELCOMED FORMATION OF THE COALITION GOVERNMENT ON APRIL 5; SOON THEREAFTER PRELIMINARY DISCUSSIONS WERE BEGUN TOWARD RESTORING THE SOVIET AID PROGRAM TO THE RLG, DORMANT SINCE 1964. THE SOVIETS ARE PREPARING TO INVITE THE KING OF LAOS FOR A MONTH-LONG STAY IN THE USSR. SOVIET PROPAGANDA ON LAOS HAS LARGELY AVOIDED ANTI-AMERICAN RHETORIC, AND THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR HAS EXPRESSED WILLINGNESS TO URGE THE PATHET LAO TO TONE DOWN ITS ANTI-AMERICAN PROPAGANDA, AND TO RETURN THE ONE AMERICAN POW WITHIN THE TERMS OF THE LAOS AGREEMENT. SO FAR, HOWEVER, THE PATHET LAO HAVE DONE NEITHER.

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PAGE 01 VIENTI 04775 02 OF 02 170555Z

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 VIENTIANE 4775

DEPT FOR EA/LC - PLEASE PASS TO AMBASSADOR WHITEHOUSE

GOALS OF SOVIET POLICY

5. THE SOVIETS MUST BE WELL-PLEASED WITH THE SUCCESS OF THEIR LOW-COST POLICY IN LAOS. THEY HAVE GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE PATHET LAO, WHICH IS ASSUMING A POSITION OF INCREASING INFLUENCE IN THE COALITION GOVERNMENT AND THE VIENTIANE SIDE ZONE AS A WHOLE. CHINESE INFLUENCE WITH THE PATHET LAO AND THE COALITION GOVERNMENT IS SLIGHT, AND THE CHINESE MUST BE SOMEWHAT APPREHENSIVE THAT THE SOVIETS APPEAR TO BE MOVING INTO A VACUUM LEFT BY AMERICAN REDUCTION IN THE INDOCHINA THEATER.

6. THE SOVIETS MUST PERCEIVE THE SITUATION IN LAOS MOVING INEXORABLY IN FAVOR OF THE PATHET LAO, AND THUS IN FAVOR
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PAGE 02 VIENTI 04775 02 OF 02 170555Z

OF SOVIET INTERESTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. WE BELIEVE MOSCOW WILL WISH TO MODERATE ANY PRECIPITOUS COMMUNIST ACTIONS IN LAOS - "PHASE-LEAPING" IN LENINIST TERMINOLOGY - TO AVOID TARNISHING THE IMAGE OF DETENTE AND PROVOKING A POSSIBLE NON-COMMUNIST RIPOSTE WHICH COULD PLUNGE LAOS BACK INTO CIVIL WAR. HOWEVER, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THE SOVIETS CAN EXERT DECISIVE INFLUENCE OVER THE PATHET LAO, EXCEPT ON THOSE ISSUES WHICH FOSTER THE INTERESTS OF ALL THREE "PARTNERS" IN THE THEATER AS A WHOLE - THE SOVIETS, THE NORTH VIETNAMESE AND THE PATHET LAO THEMSELVES. WHILE THE SOVIETS MAY THUS PLAY A MODERATING ROLE AT PRESENT, IT IS CLEAR THAT THIS ROLE IS AIMED AT EVENTUAL ESTABLISHMENT OF A COMMUNIST-DOMINATED AND SOVIET-INFLUENCED REGIME IN LAOS. SOVIET AND AMERICAN GOALS IN LAOS WILL NECESSARILY DIVERGE IN THE FUTURE.

U.S. POSTURE

7. IN DISCUSSIONS WITH SOVIETS, WE HAVE MADE FOLLOWING POINTS:

- (1) THE NORTH VIETNAMESE HAVE NOT COMPLIED WITH THE LAOS AGREEMENTS, AND HAVE NOT REMOVED THEIR TROOPS FROM LAOS;
- (2) THE PATHET LAO HAVE NOT COMPLIED WITH

A SINGLE PROVISION OF THE LAOS ACCORDS WHICH IMPOSES AN OBLIGATION, RATHER THAN CONFERS AN ADVANTAGE, UPON THEM. THEY HAVE NOT RETURNED THE AMERICAN PRISONER, AND HAVE TAKEN NO STEPS TO COMPLY WITH OTHER POWW/MIA PROVISIONS OF THE ACCORDS.

(3) AMERICAN AND THAI MILITARY PERSONNEL WERE WITHDRAWN FROM LAOS WITHIN 60 DAYS OF FORMATION OF THE COALITION GOVERNMENT. THE ONLY AMERICAN MILITARY PERSONNEL REMAINING IN LAOS NOW ARE THE APPROVED MEMBERS OF DEFENSE ATTACHE OFFICE.

(4) U.S. POLICY FULLY SUPPORTS PRIME MINISTER SOUVANNA AND HIS COALITION GOVERNMENT. U.S. SUPPORTS INDEPENDENT AND GENUINELY NEUTRAL LAOS, WHICH, WE BELIEVE, BEST SERVES INTERESTS OF ALL PARTIES AND TO A DEGREE ADVANCES CAUSE OF PEACE
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PAGE 03 VIENTI 04775 02 OF 02 170555Z

IN SOUTHEAST ASIA.

(5) U.S. URGES SOVIETS TO USE THEIR INFLUENCE WITH THE NORTH VIETNAMESE AND PATHET LAO TO FOSTER COMPLIANCE WITH THE LAOS ACCORDS. ONE SPECIFIC MOVE WE HAVE URGED ON SOVIETS IS TO PERSUADE THE PATHET LAO TO TONE DOWN THE STRIDENCY OF THEIR RADIO PATHET LAO PROPAGANDA AGAINST THE VIENTIANE SIDE, THE U.S. AND THAILAND.
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